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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/08/2017  
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SUBJECT: UNHCR COMPLETES INTERVIEWS OF NORTH KOREANS

REF: MOSCOW 211

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Alice Wells.  
Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (S) UNHCR has completed its interviews of the North Koreans asylum seekers that arrived in Moscow in January and is finalizing its assessments of their cases (reftel). UNHCR Senior Protection Officer Gang Li said that all of them had indicated they had wanted to be resettled to the United States.

¶2. (S) Li said the most pressing issue would be how to approach the GOR about these cases. UNHCR Moscow and UNHCR headquarters were discussing next steps, and acting UNHCR Moscow Representative Wolfgang Mizlow would seek guidance during consultations in Geneva, Li said. He added that he had advocated that the GOR should be notified quickly in the interest of transparency. We agreed that having UNHCR initially approach the GOR would be less likely to raise Russian sensitivities, in that this would follow the standard operating procedures UNHCR and the GOR used in dealing with North Koreans.

¶3. (S) Li added that he had spoken to the ROK Embassy about these cases, telling ROK diplomats that the North Koreans wished to go to the U.S. The South Koreans had expressed no further interest, he said.

¶4. (S) COMMENT: The introduction of the U.S. as a destination country for North Koreans will likely raise GOR suspicions. Overcoming them will require a transparent and patient approach. The GOR has had an excellent working relationship with UNHCR in resettling North Koreans to South Korea. The more we consistently we follow that model, the better our chances of getting GOR cooperation.

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